

# A Review of Ripple Upshots of Global Terrorism in Foer's Extremely Loud Incredibly Close

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**Abstract-**In 21<sup>st</sup> century who is not aware of the word terrorism? In the present time Terrorism is a terrific term well known all over the world. There is no doubt that it has become a global problem posing threats to the well-structured social fabric of all the countries of the world. Of late, terrorism is hell bent on destroying the global beauty of the unity in diversity. The whole world is watching that the continuing terrorist activities are being committed by anti-elements armed with arms and ammunitions that are out to annihilate humanity. Most of the countries like Syria, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iraq i.e. mostly from Muslim countries which are reportedly the safe haven for terrorists and their organizations are also under the strong grip of terrorism. Today, no country of the world is safe from the cruel and heinous acts of terrorists because each country across the world is being threatened and ravaged by extremism. In this way Terrorism is the biggest global problem which has affected almost all the countries of the world. The aim of present paper is to focus on the issue of global terrorism with reference to the terrorist activities or incidents as mirrored in Extremely Loud Incredibly Close by Jonathan Safran Foer who seems to have succeeded in realistically depicting the actual lethal consequences and far-reaching effects of such terroristic attacks causing mass destruction on a larger scale- injuries, death, traumatic reverberation, in his novel Extremely Loud Incredibly Close in the wake of 9/11 and Dresden terroristic sabotage or devastation.

**Keywords:** Dresden Events, Extremely Loud Incredibly Close, Jonathan Safran Foer, Terrorism, Trauma, Violence and 9/11 event.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Safran Foer is an American novelist. He is generally known for his novels Everything Is Illuminated (2002), Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (2005), and for his non-fiction writing Eating Animals (2009). "Here I Am" (2016) is his recently written novel. Foer was born in Washington, D.C. in a Jewish family. He has graduated from Princeton University in 1999 with a degree in philosophy. Joyce Carol Oates was the first author who encouraged him for writing Foer himself accepts that, "she was the first person to ever make me think I should try to write in any sort of serious way" (Wikipedia). Oates was also his consultant in writing his thesis for which Foer received Princeton's Senior Creative Writing Thesis Prize. He teaches creative writing at New York University. In 2001, he edited the anthology A Convergence of Birds: Original Fiction and Poetry Inspired by the Work of Joseph Cornell, to which he contributed the short story, "If the Aging Magician Should Begin to Believe". His Princeton thesis grew into a novel, Everything Is Illuminated, which was published by Houghton Mifflin in 2002. The book earned him a National Jewish Book Award (2001) and a Guardian First Book Award (2002).

The term terrorism has its origin from the French word trrorisme which drives from Latin Word terrere meaning "to Frighten" (googleweblight.com). According to the oxford dictionary "terrorism" means "the use of violent action in order to achieve political aims or to force a government to act." Though there is no particular definition for terrorism, in general it may be said that "terrorism is the systematic use or threatened use of violence to intimidate a population or government for political, religious, or ideological goals" (Wikipedia). Such types of terroristic activities are accomplished by the terrorists (trained in many terroristic organisations) on the name of religion and many innocent people are slaughtered brutally.

There are so many so many terroristic events accomplished by terrorists. The 9/11 attack on American World Trade Center in United States of America is one of such unprecedented events perpetrated by 19 terrorists belonging to different countries under the guidance of Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind behind the attacks and also was (delete was) the leader of Al-Qaida group, a terroristic organization. They used four American airplanes in this attack; two of the planes got crashed into World Trade Center, One was crashed into the Pentagon (military headquarter, Washington DC) and the forth in Pennsylvania. It has been reported that almost 3000 people were killed in this condemnable attack. The blast of this attack has been felt by the whole world, which shook the root of humanity by putting its existence into question mark. Since then everybody is living in the shadow of terror, fear has become the mate of human being. Most of them have fallen prey to the global terrorism.

In the wake of 9/11 incident, there has been psychological, personal, national, physical international loss, tension, terror and trauma for the whole world and for all the people who witnessed the holocaust directly or

indirectly. Trauma has its origin from the Greek word which represents “wound” so trauma represents (Psychology) a mental condition caused by severe shock, especially when the harmful effects last for a long time” or it may be “an unpleasant experience that makes somebody feel upset and or anxious”(Oxford Dic.). Trauma represents psychological impact on the people’s mind who got victimized by any ruinous or disastrous phenomenon (terrorist attack or natural disaster). Due to such events the victims remain shocked or paralytic throughout their life. The symptoms of trauma do not appear at once rather they reflect gradually with the recurrence of traumatic images through the strange or abnormal or obscure actions or deeds by the victims which Ellen Verbestel “the wounding of the mind” that is “much more complex because it is not experienced in real time, which makes it harder to register for our consciousness” (9). Sigmund Freud, who is the first originator of trauma theory in his Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895), later on this trauma came to be known as ‘Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder’ (PTSD)” (Verbestel 10).

Many texts have written in the wake of 9/11 highlighting fatal consequences of acts of terrorism that they might cause for the whole world. In the novel *Extremely Loud Incredibly Close* time-based shifts help Foer to represent the deadly waves of 9/11 trauma on the characters. Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) is an exclusive literary representation of effects of 9/11 terrorist attacks on a victim family of New York city. In this novel Foer reveals the tension and trauma between extremely rare experience and necessary social means, the initial but unprecedented, cataclysmic and incommensurable experience of vulnerability and the emotional response through the character of Oskar Schell, the protagonist. Foer used 9/11 attacks as the background for the story of 9-year-old Oskar, who learns how to deal with the death of his father in the World Trade Center. However, they also dramatize that how the survivors reminisce and integrate these traumatic experiences into their lives. The novel deals with inexorable theme of chaos and mourning which leaves the victims recognizing the profound vagueness triggered by the attacks and focus on victim’s attempt to survive by coping past with their present.

The novel begins with Oskar Schell’s speech; he lives in a flat in Manhattan with his mother and her new boyfriend and his grandparents. He is presented in the novel as a multi-talented boy, a discoverer, pacifist, freethinker, inventor and adventurer besides it he speaks French plays the tambourine and designs jewellery and learner of jujitsu. Oskar endeavours to track down the lock that fits a key he discovers in his father’s closet shortly after his sudden and pathetic death on during 9/11 terrorist attacks. Oskar hears the messages left by his father in the answering machine he (his father) was about to die:

Message one. Tuesday, 8:52 A.M. Is anybody there? Hello? It’s Dad. If you’re there, pick up. I just tried the office, but no one was picking up. Listen, something’s happened. I’m OK. They’re telling us to stay where we are and wait for the firemen. I am sure it is fine. I’ll give you another call when I have a better idea of what’s going on. Just wanted to let you know that I’m OK, and not to worry. I’ll call again soon. (Foer 14)

Oskar gets shocked after hearing these messages and when his father calls at the last moment of his life Oskar could not pick the phone though he was sitting beside the phone. He knows nothing what to do with that key so he takes the task to search the right lock or the owner. He starts his journey to search Mr. Black whose name mentioned on the envelope, containing the key. Oskar’s whole journey for the key represents his process of acting out his trauma. Perhaps it is due to what Versluys writes that, “Trauma makes time come to a standstill as the victim cannot shed his or her remembrance and is caught in a ceaseless imaginative reiteration of the traumatic experience” (3). He expresses his mourning by saying: “Then I heard Dad’s voice.” Are you there? Are you there? Are you there? He needed me, and I couldn’t pick up. I just couldn’t pick up. I just couldn’t. Are you there? He asked eleven times” (Foer 301). Here Foer highlights the physical and especially mental paralysis that often comes with a traumatic experience, “I know, because I’ve counted....Why did he keep asking? Was he waiting for someone to come home? And why didn’t he say ‘anyone’? (301) it shows that Oskar keeps repeating painful event and tries to overcome his trauma for which Freud’s term is “mourning and melancholia” and LaCapra calls this process “acting out” and “working through” (Verbestel 15).

After losing someone dear people keep thinking by guessing what and why about unpleasant happening just as Oskar thinks, “Sometimes I think he knew I was there. May be he kept saying it to give me time to get brave enough to pick up” ( Foer 301). This is the pitiable condition of the victimized people Foer describes in his novel which happens with the victims after such heinous events. Just as at the time of his father’s message Oskar could not response but he suffers from a sense of guilt rest of his life that “Do you(his father) forgive me (him)?” he is sorry that why he did not pick the phone “For not being able to pick up” and why he didn’t tell anyone about it. This sense becomes the cause of his bruises. Oskar deals with his traumatic recollections by remembering his father that “Being with him made my brain quiet. I didn’t have to invent a thing” (Foer 12). He said that after a year I still had an extremely difficult time” (Foer 36) because he cannot sleep well even he scars seeing some things like, “airplanes, firework, Arab people on the subway” (36) though he has nothing to do with them. He tries to seek substitute of his father that’s why he says, “I could invent a teakettle that can read in Dad’s voice so I could fall asleep” (1). It shows that the protagonist is meticulously linked with the trauma and wants to get victory over it.

In her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History* Cathy Caruth says about trauma that: "...sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience..."(4). Old memories of his father come in Oskar's mind again and again belatedly. It is only his love for his father that compel him to think, "human don't have their own wings, or not yet anyway, so what about a birdseed shirt" (Foer 2). He wants to invent something for the welfare of human beings he thinks so because perhaps somewhere in the core of his heart he has a feeling that his father would not have died during the attack if there was an invention like birdseed shirt. He remains engaged in posting letter to eminent people like Stephen Hawking for job so that he can divert his mind or preventing the memories of 9/11 from haunting him.

The game, Reconnaissance Expedition which Oskar usually plays with his father on Sunday. Oskar was suffering from phobia of swinging and to talk with strangers hence Thomas planned expeditions so that Oskar would have to overcome his phobia (i.e. swinging and talking to strangers) by solving the puzzle. Oskar thinks of the last game remained unfinished due to his father's death, "for the last one we ever did, which never finished, he gave me a map of Central Park." (Foer 8). perhaps that's why he take the task of seeking the owner of the key because he thinks that it is another clue to him by his father for his next Expedition. In this way Oskar's quest for the owner of the key i.e Mr. Black helps him to "stay close to (his father) for a little while longer" (Foer 304). Such shift of activities also finds comprehensive description in Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. This fantasy resonates with other forms of self-deceptive behaviour that are foregrounded throughout the novel. Old things has replaced by the cruel present.

Cathy Caruth exhibits in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* that "trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (24). It is quite apt in case of Oskar when he meets some persons having Black as their last name Oskar overcomes his phobia of talking with strangers and he eventually learns to grieve and mourn the death of his father this because when he is confessing everything that has happened to Mr. Black, Abby Black's ex-husband and a man who lost his father as well, Oskar, for the first time realizes whom he meets, were also suffering from trauma. But whenever he goes to visit any high building he scars by "imagining a plane coming at the building, just below us" (Foer 244). At the end of the novel, it seems that Oskar overcomes his trauma because he realises that his father will never come back and he shares his grief with other persons Oskar at last he learns how to comprehend other's feelings. He finds that his mother was very sad of his father's death but she never shows her grief because she does not want to transfer her sorrow to her son. On the other hands he realises that having lost his family in an accident Ron is also suffering from trauma. He embraces his mother and cries. In his flipbook he reverses the image of falling man into floating man "proves crucial to Oskar's healing process" (Keniston & Quinn 43). Through these characters Foer also throws light on the familial warmth that each character in the novel does not express his or her grief only for the sake of other's happiness just as Oskar hides the answering machine, recorded his father's messages from the other family members and his mother does the same because both of them do not want to see each other saddened.

Other characters who got victimized and traumatized by the bombings of Dresden in the Second World War and 9/11 terrorist attack in the novels are Oskar's grandparents. During the Dresden bomb blast only his grandparents remained survives all family members were died. His grandmother goes to America after losing her family in Dresden bombing. His grandfather loses his beloved and his unborn child in this incident. He also loses his ability of speaking so he tries different way of communication by carrying a notebooks, by putting words "yes" in one hand and "no" in another word, he presses the keys of phone to express his ideas like, "4,7,4,8,7,3,2,5,5,9,9,6,8?" (Foer 272) but it is not easy for other characters to understand him. Here Foer draws a pathetic picture of the victims of terrorist attacks that for these victims "Life is scarier than death" (Foer 322). It shows that sometimes trauma victims want to say or speak a lot about their teething troubles but they were not capable in expressing their feelings of grief because they do not have suitable medium of communication.

By the chance when grandmother meets Oskar's grandfather she proposes him, "Please marry me" (Foer 32). His grandfather accepts her proposal but he puts one condition that they will never have any child. For the period of their togetherness grandfather and grandmother divide their living jones between "Nothing and Something" (Foer 110) by doing this they agree that nothing jones is one's private sector where other doer not enters and in something jones they share with each other. Thus in this "Nothing" "Something" "Everything was forever fixed" (111). After some times of marriage grandmother feels need of a child for the continuation of her generation for this purpose she gets pregnant and when grandfather comes to know he leaves his wife (grandmother) and his unborn child. Though he is sorry for what he has done to his wife and his unborn son because he tries to be "the better man" but he cannot "I tried and can't" (Foer 135). But Oskar's grandparents help him in overcoming his trauma.

## CONCLUSION

In the novel the novelist articulately described ineffable trauma of all three protagonists who face aetiology of trauma and it seems that in some extent Foer got successful in the manifestation of different symptoms of their

trauma resulted from the terroristic attacks of 9/11 and Dresden bombing. The writing manoeuvre used by Foer is known as visual writings. It surveys multiple but unified scenarios which stippled with photographs of doorknobs, blank pages, overwriting, and some other peculiarities, use of mathematical digits from the keys of phone for communication, red circling on some words or sentences of the text. And finally the ending of the novel with some pages of Oskar's flipbook in which he reverses the image of a falling man into the image of floating man image (lifting from ground to sky) helps Foer to draw real portrayal of 9/11 attacks and Dresden bomb blast with their lethal impact on the victims.

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